

Exploring the interactions between paranormal belief and disbelief and subjective experiences with the Shakti helmet

ABSTRACT:

Background

The stimulation of the temporal areas of the brain with mild electromagnetic pulsing has been associated with experiences of a sensed presence.

Aims

This study explored the roles of paranormal belief, time of day and wearing a sham God Helmet on state of consciousness and the frequency of reported anomalous experiences. The contributing roles of synesthesia, hyperaesthesia and locus of control (LOC) were also explored.

Method

Thirty-two skeptics and 35 believers took part in an orientation session and three study sessions: a morning baseline (no helmet/baseline) session, a morning sham helmet session and an afternoon sham helmet session. Participants relaxed in a Faraday chamber for 30 minutes with the instruction to observe and verbalize their experiences. Exit interviews explored subjective experiences. Participants completed the Phenomenology of Consciousness Inventory (PCI). An inductive thematic analysis identified a coding scheme for types of anomalous experiences.

Results

Believers scored higher than disbelievers on Altered Experiences (AE), Positive Affect (PA) and Imagery (IM), but there were no differences in scoring on any of PCI dimensions between the three study conditions. Transcripts were blind coded for the occurrence of 15 types of anomalous experience. A series of chi square analyses identified more anomalous experiences for believers than skeptics. There were also more visual presence, flashes of color and auditory hallucinations in the helmet sessions compared to the baseline. Belief, anomalous experiences, hyperaesthesia and synesthesia correlated with some PCI variables and anomalous experiences.

Conclusions

Individual differences play a strong role in the aetiology of anomalous experiences when people wear a sham God helmet.

Keywords

Paranormal belief, Exceptional experiences, Synesthesia, Placebo

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